Revue de recherche en civilisation américaine
2009

Between fact & fiction: the use of fear in the construct and dissemination of the Black Panther Party image

Sabrina Sérac

OpenEdition Journals

Édition électronique
URL : http://journals.openedition.org/rrca/273
ISSN : 2101-048X

Éditeur
David Diallo

Référence électronique
Sabrina Sérac, « Between fact & fiction: the use of fear in the construct and dissemination of the Black Panther Party image », *Revue de recherche en civilisation américaine* [En ligne], 2009, mis en ligne le 23 septembre 2009, consulté le 01 mai 2019. URL : http://journals.openedition.org/rrca/273

Between fact & fiction: the use of fear in the construct and dissemination of the Black Panther Party image

Sabrina Sérac

NOTE DE L'AUTEUR

A previous version of this paper was given at the 2009 French Association for American Studies yearly Conference on "The Fear Factor" for in Besançon, May 2009.

The author wishes to thank Deborah Steinberg and David Kessler for proofreading.

1 The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, as it first called itself, emerged in Oakland, California in October 1966, founded by two young black Americans, Huey P. Newton (1942-1989) and Bobby Seale (1936-~). The Panthers represented a unique political synthesis derived from a broad range of roots and influences, spanning the spectrum from black nationalism and community control and self-defense, to Third World international Communism. The Black Panthers "fascinated the left, inflamed the police, terrified much of America, and had an extraordinary effect on the black community," to quote Richardson Preyer, the Chairman of the Committee on Internal Security who directed an investigation on the Panthers in 1970.[1]

2 Once labeled the "single greatest threat to the national security" by F.B.I. Director J. Edgar Hoover (1895-1972), the Black Panthers have suffered from a particularly biased and polarized treatment in the media and popular discourse. Presenting a fair and balanced portrayal of the Panthers still represents a major challenge to mainstream perceptions and scholarship. The historiography of the movement remains clouded by misperception and bias. To this day numerous publications continue to play up and capitalize upon the evil and frightening image of the BPP which remains as the principal

legacy of its past and mainstream media still rely upon and further disseminate distorted images of Panther history, goals and actions.

3 Why was there (and is there still today) so much irrationality around this relatively small group of activists? To answer this question, I intend to first examine the initial portrayal and self-representation of the Panthers, and then suggest reasons why excessive fear has always permeated depictions of the BPP. Finally, I will explore certain key aspects of more recent cultural and academic productions to assess how fear continues to be exploited in the dissemination of the Party image.

From fearmongering to trivialization: the ambivalent trajectory of the Panthers in the media

4 The battles of the Civil Rights Movement in the South demonstrated the crucial role of media coverage in achieving success and visibility. Newton, and later, Eldridge Cleaver (1935-1998), therefore strove to fashion the party around bold, striking and recognizable elements which had already become "signifiers" in African-American culture. The use of the powerful panther symbol was not new. It had first emerged in Alabama in 1965 where the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee, with the help of Stokely Carmichael (1941-1998) created the Lowndes County Freedom Organization.[2] The use of armed patrols by black Americans, a signal Panther practice, had also been developed previously.[3] The Deacons for Defense and Justice emerged in 1964 in Louisiana, patrolling their communities against Ku Klux Klan's raids and at numerous times offering protection to nonviolent Civil Rights marches.[4] But the image of the feline reached a new dimension under the bold leadership of Newton and Seale. They used it to symbolize a whole ideological structure based around community self-defense and the need to reclaim authority in that community by policing its streets. They aimed to provide an alternative to the distrusted government. They wanted to fill the symbolic void felt by black Americans, and especially the poor, in political discourse and end their exclusion from genuine mainstream representation.

5 Ideologically speaking, however, they linked the plight of black Americans to the struggle against colonialism in Third World countries. This led them to abandon the typical *modus operandi* of black nationalism by establishing political alliances with white militant groups who also opposed the status quo. They ran Panther Eldridge Cleaver for President in the 1968 presidential elections on the Peace and Freedom ticket (a principally white, middle-class California leftist political party which incidentally ran Ralph Nader for President in the 2008 American presidential elections).

6 French playwright and writer, Jean Genet (1910-1986) spent several months with the Black Panthers in 1970 and made these observations about them in *Prisoner of Love* (1986) :

> Wherever they went, the Americans were the masters, so the Panthers would do their best to terrorize the masters by the only means available to them. Spectacle.[5]

7 And spectacle, they did deliver. Here is a brief portrayal of the Panthers printed in *Newsweek* in 1970:

> They were the Bad Niggers of white America's nightmares come chillingly to life – black-bereted, black-jacketed cadre of street bloods risen up in arms against the established order. They were, they announced, the Black Panthers, and the name alone suggested menace. They swaggered, blustered, quoted Mao, preached revolution, flashed their guns everywhere and sometimes used them. [...] They are

> guerilla theater masterfully done – so masterfully that, at one point, everybody began to believe them and be frightened of them.[6]

8 As William A. Gamson and Gadi Wolsfeld have demonstrated, the media hold the paradoxical role of being resistant to unorthodox perspectives while at the same time reveling in the unconventional and juicy. Subtleties and details usually get lost in translation in such an intellectual framework, which typically results in the creation of one-dimensional, oversimplified, and easy-to-identify media objects.[7] What did not fit the conventional image was easy to ignore. For instance, in his study of the different phases of the treatment of the Panthers in the national press, Edward Morgan found that while articles about the Panthers concentrated on their confrontations with the police, their notorious leaders, and their numerous legal battles, none focused on their community programs.[8]

9 As Jane Rhodes also demonstrated in her seminal study of the relationship between the BPP and the media, headlines about black Americans usually "relied on the excitement of violent clashes and racial discord."[9] The shortcomings of journalism in the coverage of issues related to African Americans, had already been underlined by the Kerner Commission in 1967:

> (t)he news media have failed to analyze and report adequately on racial problems in the United States and, as a related manner, to meet the Negro's expectations in journalism.[10]

10 The limits of journalism's potential for true investigation can be attributed to four factors.[11] Few blacks had chairs in the press rooms; magazines and newspapers usually catered to their (middle-class, principally white) subscribers' concerns and preconceptions; few reporters were allocated to the coverage of these complex issues, (which meant that newspapers relied heavily on wire services which disseminated the same generic story to thousands of media outlets); and finally, the machinations of the FBI, which, under the guise of its COunter INTELligence PROgram, called COINTELPRO, spoon-fed at least 300 cooperating journalists with hand-made reports calculated to discredit dissenting activity in the US.[12] The resulting media dismissal explains why the underground press exploded during that period. Dissidents had to create their own alternative media to legitimate their presence in public discourse and (perhaps more importantly) to convey their message, unmediated by mainstream filters, to one another and the public at large. A concrete example of the sometimes collusive relationships between the press and the FBI was the lack of any true investigation on the part of journalists in their press coverage of the murder of Panther Fred Hampton (1948-1969) in Chicago on December 4th, 1969. The first articles covering the police raid only contained interviews with the police officers involved and statements from the State Attorney, all congratulating themselves on having survived the Panthers' violence. Subsequent ballistic, medical and independent investigations, however, thoroughly discredited this unquestioned presumption of a Panther attack and revealed falsification of evidence by the police. Only one bullet was fired by the Panthers while 90 bullets had been fired by the police.[13]

11 I cannot in this brief article detail the complete trajectory the image of the Panthers took in the mainstream media; but from their very first appearance in the national press/TV, occasioned by their May 1967 armed protest at the California State Capitol, the media's coverage was ambivalent and inconsistent, betraying the major difficulty the Panthers represented. The Panthers sometimes fell into the frame of racism in reverse, being

compared to a black Ku Klux Klan or to the Nazis with their manifest belligerence and irresponsible bravado.[14] A prophecy seemed to have materialized when, on October 28th, 1967, a confrontation involving Huey P. Newton and the police left one officer dead.

12 In 1969, a 'moral panic' emerged in response to the Panthers. First, the Chicago shootout - which left Fred Hampton dead - led the Panthers and their supporters to make allegations of genocide which spread, unverified, like wildfire in the press.[15] In this paranoid and alarmist context, growing support for the Panthers emerged in the most unexpected circles. Celebrities, socialites and elite liberals started organizing fund-raising events for the Panthers in their sumptuous residences. In response to this latest fashionable trend, a new brand of journalists emerged to make fun of these newly acquired "radical" supporters. The New Journalism was a "genre-blurred mélange of ethnography, investigative reportage, and fiction."[16] Under the guise of journalism, this genre enabled the writer to relate the events as they happened while resorting to techniques of fiction by moving imperceptibly from one perspective or viewpoint to another in the aim of reaching a "truer" and more complete version of reality. New Journalists, like Gail Sheehy, Joan Didion and Tom Wolfe, published satirical insider reports of these social events.[17] Tom Wolfe coined the phrase "Radical Chic" to designate the juxtaposition of these unlikely and eclectic assemblages of elites and "Parlour Panther(s)."[18] A typical barb would run: "The Panthers had emerged as the romanticized darlings of the politico-cultural jet set" or "We shall soon witness the birth of local Rent-a-Panther organizations. [19]" Or as *Esquire* once headlined: 'Is it Too Late for You to Be Pals with a Black Panther?'[20] These demeaning comments were meant to denounce the (sometimes) uncritical support the Panthers received and, we may wonder, ultimately served the ends of the Establishment by ridiculing New Left immature activism in the eyes of mainstream America.

13 Still in 1969, when the Panthers tried to diversify their revolutionary movement by providing community programs, the national press joined the offensive of the New Journalism and offered dismissive reactions to the BPP change. Newsweek headlined, "The Left: Guns and Butter" and wondered, "Had the Panthers turned pussicat?"[21]

The manifold causes of the fear behind the media frenzy

14 The "orgy of sensationalism" that prevailed in the media was an obvious continuation of a much older cultural stereoptype of black Americans especially, black males. Indeed, since the beginning of slavery, the fear of black insurrection was widespread. As George Frederickson (1971) demonstrated that the lasting, pregnant figure of "the black brute" emerged very early in the American psyche. Mass culture projected two stereotypes of black people, mirroring different aspects of white anxiety: first, the (unconvincing) depiction of them as happy slaves, and then, the (troubling) fear of blacks as a dangerous social menace.[22] The Panthers, with their open and armed defiance to white oppression, undoubtedly gave an all-too-manifest reality to the latter image. In *Radical Chic & Mau-Mauing the Flak Catchers* (1970), Tom Wolfe uses the term "mau-mauing" to designate the fund-raising sessions Black Panthers held in upper classes livingrooms:

15 The term mau-mauing said, "The white man has a voodoo fear of us, because deep down he still thinks we're savages. Right? So we're going to do that Savage number for him." It was like a practical joke at the expense of the white man's superstitiousness.[23]

16 Although one must remember the long, troubled historical legacy of racial slavery and racial discord that led to these anxious stereotypes, it is also necessary to remember the context of the late 60s, the period of the Vietnam War and the growing backlash against the Civil rights Movement. In so doing, there are several aspects to consider.

17 First, between 1964 and 1971, more than 700 riots erupted in American cities, mostly arising in black ghettos and neighborhoods. There were hundreds of deaths, more than 20,000 injured people and millions of dollars of damage.[24] A widespread, diffuse atmosphere of fear and a sense of volatility reigned. Everyone believed that further violence might erupt, seemingly out of the blue, anytime, anywhere, as massive social unrest continued. With many of their neighborhoods burned or looted in these riots, the American black community was in an especially restless state. The Panthers exploited this unsettled atmosphere by endeavoring to shape a revolutionary movement utilizing this untapped pool of "soldiers." Indeed, contrary to Communist orthodoxy, the Panthers wanted to organize the "brothers on the blocks." Using Franz Fanon's *TheWretched of the Earth* (1961) as the ideological bible for their political aims, they conceptualized the black community as a colony within the US which required a cleansing violence to rid itself of the oppressor. Using the Lumpenproletariat (the class of people living on the fringe of society: pimps, hustlers, the homeless, drug dealers... people who have nothing to lose) as the forefront or vanguard of their "revolution," they thought they could exploit that class of people and, at the same time, cause a sensation in the media by playing on fears of irresponsible, rebellious and (perhaps ultimately) uncontrollable violence.

18 This volatile atmosphere was well captured by psychiatrists William Grier and Price Cobbs (1968):

> (b)lacks bent double by oppression have stored energy which will be released in the form of rage, black rage, apocalyptic and final. [...] The time seems near for the full range of the black masses to put down the broom and buckle on the sword.[25]

19 Another factor to consider when studying the Panthers is the fact (for reasons that are interesting to speculate about) that they kept no written record of their membership. Estimates run from 1,500 to 5,000 core members and a few hundred-thousand supporters. This lack of reliable and available data provided malleability and leeway to the question of their strength. This definitely played into the hands of the media and law enforcement services, which could, as required by circumstance, minimize, exaggerate or distort the Panthers' actual importance and threat. The "enemy" was unquantifiable, making it even more elusive.

20 What also proved particularly troublesome and challenging in the treatment of the Panthers was that there was little continuity in ideology or leadership. It is indeed impossible to freeze the Black Panther Party in time as leaders were in and out of prison (or in exile), and depending on who was leading the Party at any given moment, the tone, the emphasis and strategy would differ.

21 Finally, the Panthers, by pledging allegiance to Third World Communism and referring positively to Mao, Lenin, Marx, and Kim Il Sung exhibited a strong stance of willful defiance towards their own country at the height of the Cold War. Their links to Communist countries and self-proclaimed Marxist-Leninism, however tenuous, were not

lost on their detractors. On the side of the Panthers' supporters, there was reasonable concern that statutes (such as the McCarran Act or the Smith Act) passed to hamper Communists during the McCarthy era or used earlier against Japanese Americans during WWII would be invoked again.[26] And indeed, these fears were grounded as a myriad of different charges could be pressed and then dropped on any individual or group of activists. A notorious example was the federal antiriot bill voted by Congress in 1969, the H. Rap Brown Act, which made it a federal crime to cross state borders to make speeches/ performances that were too "militant" in tone (or in the bill's vocabulary: to incite riots); it was meant to contain and stifle dissent. The full force of this law was used in 1973 during the occupation of Wounded Knee by the American Indian Movement.[27]

22 Since 1919, the FBI was headed by J. Edgar Hoover, who notoriously hated Communism and Communists of any sort. By 1956, he launched a national campaign, specifically designed "to discredit, disrupt and neutralize » organizations which the Bureau characterized as « Black Nationalist Hate Groups » to prevent the rise of a black "messiah."[28] ALL means were used to reach this goal: infiltration, disinformation, pre-trial jailings, trumped-up trials, exacerbation of tensions and conflicts within the BPP, and with Panther rivals, even murder was part of the FBI toolkit.[29] Overall, a tense atmosphere of conflict developed between the critics of the Panthers, some of whom saw them as the military arm of the Communist Party, USA or dangerous subversives intent upon racially tinted violence and the Panther's supporters, who struggled against constitutional infringements and unconstitutional FBI harassment of the Panthers.[30]

23 In light of these elements, the magnitude of the retaliation against the BPP might retrospectively appear exaggerated, but the struggle between the Panthers and the "authorities" was far from insignificant. What was at stake was the legitimacy and ownership of authority. By policing the streets, challenging an impressive amount of charges in the courts, lifting the veil from the structural inequalities and contradictions in American society and providing material aid to the black community, the Panthers represented more than a small group of bombastic ghetto activists. They positioned themselves as substitutes to the official authority. The taking of titles, like "Minister de Defense", "Prime Minister", could be seen as more than a stylistic device. Though their power was more performative than real, their "symbolic power" or endeavor had to be stopped and no means was to be spared to facilitate their demise (Bourdieu 1990).[31]

The BPP from the 60s to this day: the fruitful legacy of violence

24 During the 1980s and 1990s, a rebirth of interest in the movements of the 60s emerged. Countless publications and newly available archival materials in universities reignited research. But beyond these developments, the brutal beating of Rodney King in 1992 at the hands of the LAPD and the ensuing riots expressed the culmination of frustration for the 1990s generation. Many felt that not much had changed since Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale had patrolled the ghettos of Oakland to prevent police brutality. However, blacks had come to expect more just treatment. Urban black communities, sometimes plagued with internecine gang warfare and a culture and economy in which drugs played a significant role, witnessed the emergence of new cultural productions celebrating, re-articulating and appropriating the legacy of the Panthers.

25 Among the first attempts to bring the 60s to the 90s was the hip-hop group Public Enemy with their album, *Fear of a Black Planet* (1987). Their song 'Power to the People' revived the spirit of black nationalism and opened the doors for other artists to claim their heritage from the Panthers. Rappers and hip-hop artists such as Paris, KRS-One and Tupac Shakur (whose parents had been Panthers), among others, expanded in this vein and used the iconography and rhetoric of the Panthers in some of their songs and videos. To quote a line from the album, *Pump Ya Fist: Hip-Hop Inspired by the Panthers*, "We are the children and parents of an unfinished revolution;" artists of this period claimed to be purveyors of the memory of the Panthers, aiming to politicize people of their generation and, in a way, to pick up the struggle where the Panthers had left it.[32]

26 Parallel to this new dimension in popular culture, the appearance of several autobiographies by former members of the BPP reignited the interest of scholars and students in the BPP. *Assata: An Autobiography* by Assata Shakur (1987), Elaine Brown's *A Taste of Power* (1992), and David Hilliard's *This Side of the Glory* (1993) are just a few of the publications which lifted the veil from the Panthers' inner workings and revealed, among other things, concrete allegations and details about violent episodes involving the Party leadership. These revelations and especially the light they cast upon the deeply ambivalent figure of Huey P. Newton (who died in 1989 at the hands of a drug dealer in Oakland) did not fall on deaf ears. Journalist Hugh Pearson exploited these newly revealed and juicy details in an outrageous, macabre and sensationalist account of the troubled Newton. In *The Shadow of the Panther: Huey Newton and the Price of Black Power in America* (1994), Pearson used unreliable sources, biased interviews and suspect revelations. His partisan book more resembles sensationalist journalism than objective investigation. But its striking popular success betrayed a still vivid, almost salacious thirst for narratives confirming the dirty side of the Panthers which seemed to satisfy the expectations of many people.

27 In 'Memory and American History,' David Thelen (1989) reflects on the impact of the past on the present. He shows how memory is "a subjective process of active construction" that shapes and reshapes groups' identities.[33] He writes:

> People reshape their recollections of the past to fit their present needs. [...] Since people's memories provide security, authority, legitimacy, and finally identity in the present, struggles over the possession and interpretation of memories are deep, frequent, and bitter.[34]

28 Such a struggle over who should tell the story of the BPP occurred in 1995 when the movie *Panther* came out.[35] Directed by Mario Van Peebles and based on a novel written by his father Melvin Van Peebles (who directed *Sweet Sweetback's Badasssss* Song in 1971), the father and son's treatment of the BPP was fragmented, to say the least. By focusing on the first two years of the Party only, the movie concentrated on guns and drugs, downplaying and ignoring major aspects of the BPP history (such as their community programs, their interest in ideological and political analysis, the path-breaking and fundamental role of women as leaders in the group, the interracial movement the Panthers tried to build, and their eventual return to conventional politics in the mid-70s, to offer just a few examples). Accused of "romanticizing dangerous criminals (and) playing fast and loose with history," the movie was, as a critic wrote: "a Molotov cocktail of fact and fancy" and proved to be a gross oversimplification of the development and complexity of the Panthers.[36] If anything positive can be said, it is that this selective treatment was meant to emphasize the frightful violence and hyper-masculine image of the Panthers with the

aim of teaching a new generation the heavy price that must be paid for a culture of arms and drugs. In general, what we observe when we consider the image of the Panthers in popular culture in this period is a form of celebration of the Panthers as defiant and daring revolutionaries, but stripped of their substance and contribution as a political group. By focusing on criminality and the connection between guns and drugs, the Panthers thus reached the status of folk heroes of the ghettos in the 90s' imagination. They acquired the status of previous legends of organized crime, becoming iconic and archetypal figures like Stagger Lee Shelton, more widely known as Stagolee, for example.

29 Of course, the continuing emphasis on Panther violence and danger observed in the 90s would not be complete without the ultimate "compliment" of a comparison with today's American public enemy #1: Osama Bin Laden. *The Black Scholar*, in its Summer 2007 issue on "Facets of Black Masculinity," published the article, "A Comparison of the Political Thought of Huey P. Newton and Ossama Bin Laden" by Robert Stanley Oden.[37] Under the guise of academic discourse, Oden attempts to denounce the infringement upon constitutional rights that Islamist activists endured under the Bush administration. He draws a far-fetched comparison with the situation of the Panthers in the context of the 1960s. Admittedly, the Panthers faced a form of repression when they experienced a long series of trumped-up trials that kept them off the streets and drained the Party's resources. The misuse of law and exploitation of fears and insecurity that the Panthers suffered were tactics that indeed reached their peak in post-9/11 America. But using Newton's largely rhetorical fight against American imperialism, his concept of "revolutionary suicide," to make sweeping statements about the Panthers and to take the threat the Panthers represented at face value as credible grounds for comparison with a fanatic and terrorist group that actually carried out major terrorist attacks is definitely a huge leap.[38] Such projections, however, naturally fit into the scheme that has always been used to define the Panthers and is therefore too easily swallowed as appropriate. In reality this comparison probably speaks far more about the concerns of the author and the time in which the article was written than about the supposed object of study itself. We should also add that such exaggerated comparison runs the dangerous risk of weakening the meaning of terms like "terrorism" in discourse. Creating such an amalgam between BPP & Al Qaeda in people's mind is a disservice to any objective evaluation of the BPP. A nuanced reflection upon the evolution of the use of fear in American politics in the period between the Panthers and the 9/11 terrorists attacks would have been far more to the point.

30 I have presented a general view of the main layers interfering with our understanding and evaluation of the BPP. Symptomatic of American race relations, the Panthers were, and are still, archetypal figures resulting from, and I quote Toni Morrison in *Playing in the Dark*: "a fabricated brew of darkness, otherness, alarm, and desire that is uniquely American."[39]

31 Strategically playing on sensitive racial fears, the Panthers quickly lost control of their image as their strategy backfired to serve the ends of their opponents. To maintain visibility, the Panthers had to outdo themselves and serve the outrageousness that was expected of them. Caught in the restrictive frame of their creation, the Panthers proved unable to switch strategies and modify the language and tone of their discourse and be acknowledged as having developed and changed. They were trapped by their media stereotype.

32 Over time, the image of the Black Panthers came to reflect the projections of different fears and anxieties, sometimes reaching the status of "folk devils" (Cohen 1972) in the American psyche, depending on the era in which they were being considered.[40] Starting with the fear of Communism, black vengeance and blind insurgency, and more recently terrorism, narratives and counter-narratives have confronted one another in a borderline play on the complex and ambiguous legacy of the Panthers. The treatment of the Panthers in the media, popular culture, and sometimes even academia is ultimately the result of a long tradition of lack of critical distance towards them.

33 Scholarship is partly responsible for this ongoing phenomenon. Indeed, it took decades to invalidate the "declension model" which dichotomized the "good 60s" and the "bad 60s," and which identified the Panthers as one of the groups responsible not just for the unrealized dreams of a whole generation but also for the 80's backlash.[41] This persistent image was largely circulated with the wide circulation of narratives from white former pro-turned-deeply-disillusioned-anti-Panthers. For instance, Todd Gitlin's and especially David Horowitz's well-publicized memoirs or recollections shaped the discourse on the Panthers for more than a decade.[42]

34 The last major attempt at evaluating and discussing the Panthers dates back to 2003 (book published in 2006). An international series of conferences were organized at Wheelock College, MA with, for the first time, scholars and researchers who were not activists, Panthers or former friends of the Panthers. Since this evaluation is extremely recent and is going on today, it has not yet influenced or penetrated mainstream perceptions of the BPP. Though the Panthers have caused much ink to flow, much remains to be uncovered and written about them. Understanding that much past discussion and scholarship on the Panthers have either saturated, flattened, or erased their contribution is the first step in starting a fair and balanced evaluation of their history and contributions.

BIBLIOGRAPHIE

Books:

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1990. *In Other Words: Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology* (Stanford : Stanford University Press)

Brown, Elaine. 1992. *A Taste of Power: A Black Woman's Story* (New York: Anchor Books)

Carmichael, Stokely (with Ekwueme Michael Thelwell. 2003. *Ready for Revolution : The Life and Struggle f Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Ture)* (New York : Scribner)

Churchill, Ward and Jim Vander Wall. 1988. Agents of Repression: The FBI's Secret War Against the Black Panther Party and the American Indian Movement (Boston: South End Press)

Churchill, Ward and Jim Vander Wall. 2002. The Cointelpro Papers : Documents from the FBI's Secret War Against Dissent in the United States (Cambridge: Sounth End Press)

Cleaver, Kathleen and George Katsiaficas (ed.). 2001. Liberation, Imagination, and the Black Panther Party : A New Look at the Panthers and their Legacy (New York : Routledge)

Collier, Peter and David Horowitz. 1996. *Destructive Generation: Second Thoughts About the '60s* (New York: Free Press Paperbacks)

Davis, James Kirkpatrick. 1997. Asssault on the Left: The FBI and the Sixties Antiwar Movement (Westport : Praeger)

Frederickson, George. 1971. The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914 (New York: Harper and Row)

Genet, Jean. 2003. *Prisoner of Love* (New York: New York Review of Books)

Gitlin, Todd. 1993. *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bentam Books)

Goffman, Erving. 1974. *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (Boston: Northeastern University Press)

Granjon, Marie-Christine. 1985. *L'Amérique de la contestation : Les années 60 aux Etats-Unis* (Paris : Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques)

Grier, William and Price M. Cobbs. 1968. *Black Rage* (New York: Basic Books, Inc.)

Hill, Lance. 2004. *The Deacons for Defense: Armed Resistance and the Civil Rights Movement* (Chapel Hill: The University of North California Press)

Hilliard, David and Lewis Cole. 1993. This Side of the Glory: The Autobiography of David Hilliard and the Story of the Black Panther Party (Chicago: Lawrence Hills Books)

Horowitz, David. 1997. *Radical Son: A Generational Odyssey* (New York: Touchstone)

Lazerow, Jama and Yohuru Williams (ed.). 2006. In Search of the Black Panther Party: New Perspectives on a Revolutionary Movement (Durham: Duke University Press)

Morrison, Toni. 1992. Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination (London: Picador)

Newton, Huey P. 1973. *Revolutionary Suicide* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc.)

Pearson, Huey. 1994. The Shadow of the Panther: Huey Newton and the Price of Black Power in America (Cambridge: Helix Books)

Preyer, Richardson. 1971. *Gun-Barrel Politics: THE BLACK PANTHER PARTY, 1966-1971*. (U.S. Government Printing Office)

Rhodes, Jane. 2007. Framing the Black Panthers: The Spectacular Rise of a Black Power Icon (New York: The New Press)

Shakur, Assata. 1987. *Assata: An Autobiography* (Chicago: Lawrence Hills Books)

Sheehy, Gail. Panthermania: The Clash of Black Against Black in One American City (New York: Harper & Row)

Wilkins, Roy and Ramsey Clark. 1973. The Search and Destroy: A Report by the Commission of Inquiry in to the Black Panthers and the Police (New York: Metropolitan Applied Research Center, Inc.)

Articles or essays:

Academic papers or book chapters:

Churchill, Ward. 2001. '"To Disrupt, Discredit and Destroy:" The FBI's Secret War Against the Black Panther Party' in *Liberation, Imagination, and the BPP* (New York: Routledge)

D'arcus, Bruce. 'Protest, Scale, and Publicity: The FBI and the H Rap Brown Act' in *Antipode,* 2003, Volume 35, n°4

Echols, Alice. 'We Gotta Get Out of This Place: Notes Towards a Remapping of the Sixties,' *Socialist Review*, 1992, n°2

Gamson, William A. and Gadi Wolsfeld, 'Movements and Media as Interacting Systems', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences*, July 1993, n°528

Morgan, Edward P. 2006. 'Media Culture and the Public Memory of the Black Panther Party' in *In Search of the Black Panther Party: New Perspectives on a Revolutionary Movement* (Durham: Duke University Press)

Oden, Robert Stanley. 'A Comparison of the Political Thought of Huey P. Newton and Osama Bin Laden', *The Black Scholar*, 2007, vol.37, n°2

Staub, Michael E. 'Black Panthers, New Journalism, and the Rewriting of the Sixties,' *Representations*, 1997, n°57

Thelen, David. 'Memory and American History', *The Journal of American History*, 1989, vol. 75, n°4

Press articles:

Clines, Stanley. 'The Case that Brought Back Radical Chic,' *The New York Times,* 13 August 1995

Corliss, Richard Elizabeth L. Bland. 'Power to the Peephole', *Time*, 5/15/95

Epstein, Edward J. 'The Panthers and the Police: A Pattern of Genocide ?', *New Yorker*, 13 February 1971

'Is It Too Late for You To Be Pals with a Black Panthers ?' *Esquire*, November 1970

Kilday, Gregg and Frank Swertlow. 'Power to the Peebles,' *Entertainment Weekly*, 5/12/95

Newsweek, 5 May 1969

The New York Times, 3 May 1967

The New York Times, 16 January 1970

'The Panthers and the Law', *Newsweek*, February 23, 1970

Wolfe, Tom. 'Radical Chic : That Party at Lenny's', *The New York Times*, 8 June 1970

Others:

Collins, William J. and Robert A. Margo. 2004. 'The Economic Aftermath of The 1960s Riots in American Cities: Evidence from Property Values.' (Unidentified academic paper, Vanderbilt University and NBER)

Hulett, John. 1966. 'The Black Panther Party": Speech by John Hulett, Interview with Stokely Carmichael, Report from Lowndes County' (New York: Merit Publishers)

Music:

Public Enemy. 1987. *Fear of a Black Planet* (Def Jam)

Various artists. 1995. Pump Ya Fist: Hip-Hop Inspired by the Panthers (Polydor)

Movie:

Van Peebles, Melvin and Mario. 1995. *Panther* (PolyGram, 119 mn.)

Internet websites:

http://www.itsabouttimebpp.com/home/home.html (most important archival website animated by Billy X Jennings, former Black Panther)

http://www.itsabouttimebpp.com/home/bpp_program_platform.html (to read the BPP platform & program)

http://www.icdc.com/~paulwolf/cointelpro/cointel.htm (website dedicated to the FBI's COINTELPRO)

http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/6545/ (excerpts from the Kerner Commission)

http://nymag.com/news/features/46170/ (to access Tom Wolfe's article)

NOTES

1. Preyer, Richardson. 1971. 'Summation,' in *Gun-Barrel Politics: the Black Panther Party, 1966-1971* (Washington: US Government Printing Office), p.143.
2. Carmichael, Stokely (with Ekwueme Michael Thelwell. 2003. *Ready for Revolution: The Life and Struggle f Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Ture).* (New York: Scribner), pp. 457-473.
3. Hulett, John. 1966. 'The Black Panther Party: Speech by John Hulett, Interview with Stokely Carmichael, Report from Lowndes County' (New York: Merit Publishers)
4. Hill, Lance. 2004. *The Deacons for Defense: Armed Resistance and the Civil Rights Movement* (Chapel Hill: The University of North California Press)
5. Genet, Jean. 2003. *Prisoner of Love* (New York: New York Review of Books), p.99.
6. 'The Panthers and the Law.' *Newsweek,* February 23, 1970, p.26.
7. Gamson, William A. and Gadi Wolsfeld, 'Movements and Media as Interacting Systems', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences*, 1993, n°528, p.119.
8. Morgan, Edward P. 2006. "Media Culture and the Public Memory of the Black Panther Party" in *In Search of the Black Panther Party: New Perspectives on a Revolutionary Movement.* (Durham: Duke University Press), p.331.
9. Rhodes, Jane. 2007. *Framing the Black Panthers: The Spectacular Rise of a Black Power Icon* (New York: The New Press), p.53.
10. Rhodes, p.62. In 1967, Pdt Lyndon B. Johnson established the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, mostly known as the Kerner Commission, to enquire on the causes behind the numerous race riots shaking American cities. Excerpts from its final Report can be consulted here: http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/6545/
11. Rhodes, p.42.
12. Churchill, Ward. 2001. '"To Disrupt, Discredit and Destroy:" The FBI's Secret War Against the Black Panther Party' in *Liberation, Imagination, and the BPP* (New York: Routledge), p.84.
13. See Wilkins, Roy and Ramsey Clark. 1973. *The Search and Destroy: A Report by the Commission of Inquiry in to the Black Panthers and the Police* (New York: Metropolitan Applied Research Center, Inc.)
14. *New York Time*, 3 May 1967. By using the concept of "frame", I refer to Erving Goffman's concept in *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1974). An example of the occasional comparison to Nazi Germany: "To Seale, even more than to Hitler, the gun is a mystic symbol of defiance and virility" (quoted in Staub, Michael E. 'Black Panthers, New Journalism, and the Rewriting of the Sixties,' *Representations*, 1997, n°57, p.60).

15. Epstein, Edward J. 'The Panthers and the Police: A Pattern of Genocide ?', *New Yorker, 13 February 1971.*

16. Staub, p.54.

17. See Wolfe, Tom. 'Radical Chic : That Party at Lenny's', *The New York Times*, 8 June 1970 (accessible online: http://nymag.com/news/features/46170/) or Sheehy, Gail. *Panthermania: The Clash of Black Against Black in One American City* (New York: Harper & Row). A similar trend emerged in the 1990s around the case of Mumia Abu Jamal, former Black Panther ('The Case that Brought Back Radical Chic,' *The New York Times*, 13 August 1995).

18. Wolfe, Tom. 1970. *Radical Chic & Mau-Mauing the Falk Catchers* (New York : Bantam Books), p.74.

19. *New York Times*, 16 January 1970.

20. 'Is It Too Late for You To Be Pals with a Black Panthers ?' *Esquire*, November 1970.

21. *Newsweek*, 5 May 1969.

22. Frederickson, George. 1971. *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914* (New York: Harper and Row), p.17.

23. Wolfe, Tom. 1999. *Radical Chic & Mau-Mauing the Flak Catchers* (New York: Bantam Books), p.107.

24. Collins, William J. and Robert A. Margo. 2004. 'The Economic Aftermath of The 1960s Riots in American Cities:
Evidence from Property Values.' (Unidentified academic paper, Vanderbilt University and NBER), p.21.

25. Grier, William and Price M. Cobbs. 1968. *Black Rage* (New York: Basic Books, Inc.), p.210-211.

26. To further explore this aspect, refer to: Davis, James Kirkpatrick. 1997. *Asssault on the Left: The FBI and the Sixties Antiwar Movement* (Westport : Praeger)

27. D'arcus, Bruce. 'Protest, Scale, and Publicity: The FBI and the H Rap Brown Act' in *Antipode*, 2003, Volume 35, n°4, pp.718-741. The Act was named after H. Rap Brown, one of the leaders of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, who faced charges when a riot erupted after one of his speeches. Cf Granjon, Marie-Christine. 1985. *L'Amérique de la contestation : Les années 60 aux Etats-Unis* (Paris : Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques), p.286.

28. Memorandum from G. C. Moore to W. C. Sullivan, 2/29/68, pp.3-4.

29. Churchill, Ward and Jim Vander Wall. 1988. *Agents of Repression: The FBI's Secret War Against the Black Panther Party and the American Indian Movement* (Boston : South End Press), pp.63-99 or Churchill, Ward and Jim Vander Wall. 2002. *The Cointelpro Papers: Documents from the FBI's Secret War Against Dissent in the United States* (Cambridge: Sounth End Press), pp.91-165.

30. The National Lawyers' Guild was very much involved in the legal challenges the Panthers faced.

31. Bourdieu, Pierre. 1990. *In Other Words: Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology* (Stanford: Stanford University Press), p.137.

32. Rhodes, pp.18-24.

33. Thelen, David 'Memory and American History', *The Journal of American History*, 1989, vol. 75, n° 4, p.1129.

34. Thelen, p.1121, p.1126.

35. Van Peebles, Melvin and Mario. 1995. *Panther* (PolyGram, 119 mn.)

36. Gregg Kilday and Frank Swertlow. 'Power to the Peebles,' *Entertainment Weekly*, 5/12/95; Richard Corliss and Elizabeth L. Bland. 'Power to the Peephole,' *Time*, 5/15/95.

37. Oden, Robert Stanley. 'A Comparison of the Political Thought of Huey P. Newton and Osama Bin Laden', *The Black Scholar*, 2007, vol.37, n°2, pp.53-60.

38. Newton, Huey P. 1973. *Revolutionary Suicide* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc.), pp.3-10.

39. Morrison, Toni. 1992. *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (London: Picador), p.38.
40. Cohen, Stanley. *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers* (cited in Staub, p.57).
41. Echols, Alice. 'We Gotta Get Out of This Place: Notes Towards a Remapping of the Sixties,' *Socialist Review,* 1992, n°2, p.15.
42. Gitlin, Todd. 1993. *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam Books); Horowitz, David. 1997. *Radical Son: A Generational Odyssey* (New York: Touchstone); Collier, Peter and David Horowitz. 1996. *Destructive Generation: Second Thoughts About the '60s* (New York: Free Press Paperbacks)

RÉSUMÉS

Cet article se propose d'étudier la prégnance de la peur dans la représentation des Panthères Noires de 1966 à nos jours. S'appuyant sur une grande diversité de documents (rapports d'enquêtes gouvernementales, articles de presse, publications académiques et productions culturelles), cette étude commencera par brosser un panorama succinct de la trajectoire médiatique des Panthères Noires. Ensuite, l'accent sera mis sur les causes possibles expliquant la peur irrationnelle qu'a pu déclencher le Parti des Panthères Noires. Enfin, nous nous pencherons sur la production académique et culturelle récente pour évaluer comment la peur des Panthères Noires est articulée et toujours exploitée.

This article intends to study the resonance of fear in the representation of the Black Panthers from 1966 to today. Based on a great variety of documents (reports from federal commissions, newspaper articles, scholarly papers and cultural productions), this study will start with a brief survey of the trajectory of the Panthers in the media. The focus will then concern the possible underlying causes behind the irrational fear of the Panthers. Finally, recent academic and cultural productions will be assessed to reveal how fear is still articulated or made to work in relation to the Black Panther Party.

INDEX

Mots-clés : la peur en politique américaine, mouvements sociaux américains, nationalisme noir, Parti des Panthères Noires, représentation et identité
Keywords : American social movements, black nationalism, Black Panther Party, fear in American politics, representation and identity

AUTEUR

SABRINA SÉRAC

Université Montesquieu-Bordeaux IV / CLIMAS EA 4196